

RTF 323-1

Experimental Film: History and Aesthetics

Fall 2002

10-12 TuTh

119 Louis Hall

Chuck Kleinhans

office: 209 AMS, 491-2255; 491-7315

office hours 3-5 Wed and by appointment

chuckkle@northwestern.edu

TA: Amy Beste, a-beste@northwestern.edu

permission of instructor required. Students must attend first class. Prerequisite: undergrad majors--completion of 100 and 200 level requirements; nonmajors RTF 220 or senior standing; grads: permission of instructor.

An introduction to the history and aesthetics of the film avant garde from the 1920s in Europe to contemporary US work. Emphasis is on exploring the range of experimental film practices and developing critical and aesthetic concepts for discussing avant garde work. A thematic emphasis on US work of the 50s, 60s, and 70s will consider the parallels between the Beat Generation, Pop Art and the Counterculture and contemporaneous film work.

The course combines screenings, lectures, discussions, readings, and off campus screenings. Films are the main texts for the course. Films will be screened in class and cannot be seen at other times. Thus attendance is important and will help determine the grade. Assigned work includes 5 short reports on field work in Chicago's experimental film and video scene and a joining art world, an in-class midterm and a final. The final can be either a take-home or in-class (undergrad option).

Grad students will do additional reading and writing, including a take-home final. Grad students will have an additional screening/discussion section that will meet several times during the quarter 9-10 on Tu or Th. All grads are expected to read :

Sitney, P. Adams. *Visionary Film*, second edition. The book is out of print; a copy will be on two hour reserve. (If the third edition is finally in print, it is required.)

James, David E. *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*. Princeton Univ. Press. The book is out of print; a copy will be on two hour reserve.

Because many films from different sources are being screened, some actual screening dates may change

Required books (available at Norris Center Store)

Rees, A. L., *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (London:British Film Institute, 1999) paperback

P. Adams Sitney, ed, *Film Culture Reader* (reprint by Cooper Square Press).

additional suggested reading (attend first class before purchase)

Charters, Ann. *The Portable Beat Reader* (Penguin/Viking, 1992)

week one

Thurs Sept 26

Stan Brakhage, *Mothlight* (Canyon) (1963, color, silent, 4 min.)

Marie Menken, *Arabesque for Kenneth Anger* (FMC) (c. 1960, color, sound, 4 min.)

Sallie Fuchs, *It Scares Me to Feel This Way* (Canyon) (1987, b&w 11 min)

Paul Sharits, *T,o,u,c,h,i,n,g* (FMC) (1968, sound, color, 12 min.)

week two

Tu Oct 1

read: (on electronic reserve)

Berger, John. "The Moment of Cubism," in Berger, *The Moment of Cubism and Other Essays*.

Rees, Introduction 1-15

in Sitney FCR: Interview with Stan Brakhage (201-229, esp. 208-210) and Jane Brakhage, *The Birth Film*, 230-233.

Sara Kathryn Arledge, *Introspection* (Canyon) (1941, color, sound, 7 min.)

Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (NU) (1943, b&w, silent, 14 min.)

Brakhage, *Window Water Baby Moving* (NU) (1959, color, silent, 12 min.)

Ernie Gehr, *Serene Velocity* (FMC) (1970, 23 min, color)

Th Oct 3

read: (on electronic reserve)

Kirby, Michael. "The Aesthetics of the Avant-Garde," in Kirby, *The Art of Time*. 1969

in Sitney: Richter Film as an Original Art Form (15-20); Sitney, *Structural Film* (326-348)

Beatniks--commence additional reading!

Standish Lawder, *Runaway* (Canyon) (1969, b&w, 6 min.)

Jonas Mekas, *Lost Lost Lost* (FMC) (the film is 3 hours long--we will watch about 2 hours and 40 minutes this time--see Oct. 8)

week three

*****SPECIAL SCREENING TIMES**

Tu Oct 8

Reading: Rees 15-47

At 9 am we will continue *Lost Lost Lost*

grad students are required to attend at 9 am. for undergrads it is an option.

"Beatniks" are expected to attend

Man Ray, *Retour à la Raison* (NU Video) (1923, b&w, silent, 3 min.)

Rene Clair, *Entr'acte* (NU) (1924, b&w, silent 14 min.)

Robert Florey and Slavko Vorkapitch, *Life and Death of 9413, A Hollywood Extra* (NU video) (1928, b&w, silent, 11 min.)

Th Oct 10

read: in Sitney, forum on Poetry and Film 171-186; Arnheim, To Maya Deren 84-86.

Luis Bunuel & Salvador Dali, *Un Chien Andalou* (An Andalousian Dog) (NU) (1928, b&w silent, 16 min.)

Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon* (NU) (1943/59, b&w, sound, 14 min.)

Maya Deren, *At Land* (NU) (1944, b&w, silent, 15 min)

Maya Deren, *A Study in Choreography for the Camera* (FMC, \$28) (1945, b&w silent, 4 min)

week four

Tu Oct 15

read: handout, Maholy-Nagy, "Dynamic of the Metroplis"

Lazlo Maholy-Nagy, *Maholy-Nagy Program* (35 min MoMA)

Fernand Leger, *Ballet Mechanique* (MoMA)

clip from Vertov, *The Man With The Movie Camera* (NU film on video) USSR, 1929

Th Oct 17

Rees 47-62

in Sitney: Peterson, A Note on Comedy 398-403, Sitney "preface" and Introduction 3-12

Maya Deren, *Meditation on Violence* (video) (1948. b&w, sound, 12 min.)

Maya Deren, *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (video) (1945-6, b&w, silent, 15 min.)

Sidney Peterson, *The Cage*, (Canyon) (1947, b&w, sound, 25 min.)

James Broughton, *The Bed* (NU video) (1968, color, sound, 19 min.)

week five

Tu, Oct 22

read in Sitney : Mekas, Experimental Film in America 21-26; Tyler, Preface to the Problems of Experimental Film 42-51

midterm

Gunvor Nelson, *My Name is Oona* (Canyon) (1969, b&w, sound, 9.5 min)

Sidney Peterson, *The Lead Shoes* (Canyon) (1949, b&w, sound, 18 min.)

Th Oct 24

Rees 62-77

in Sitney: Mekas, Call for a New Generation (73-76), ; First Statement of the New American Cinema Group 79-83.

Willard Maas, *Image in the Snow* (Canyon) (29 min b&w)

Jean Genet, *Un Chant D'Amour* (NY filmmakers Coop) (1950, 26 min.)

week six

Tu Oct 29

read (on e-reserve) Kenneth Rexroth, *American Poetry in the Twentieth Century* (NY: Seabury, 1973 [rpt. of 1971] chapter 9 (pp 136-160)
in Sitney; Tyler, *For Shadows, Against Pull My Daisy* 108-118

Sara Kathryn Arledge, *What is a Man?* (FMC) (1958. color, sound, 10 min.)
Robert Frank & Alfred Leslie, *Pull My Daisy*
(Houston Museum of Fine Art)
Edward Bland, *The Cry of Jazz* (CK video, personal copy) (1959, b&w, sound, c. 20 min.)

Th Oct 31 (halloween)

read in Sitney: Mekas, *Notes on the New American Cinema*, 87-107

Shirley Clarke, *The Connection* (NU video) (1961)

week seven**Tu Nov 5**

Read in Sitney: Mekas, *Notes on Some New Movies*, 317-325

Marie Menken, *Hurry Hurry* (FMC,) (3 min.)
Carolee Schneeman, *Fuses* (CK copy)
Jack Smith, *Flaming Creatures* (NU video) (1963, b&w, sound, 45 min)

Th Nov 7

Read in Sitney: Schneeman on *Scorpio Rising*, 277-279; Appendix: Independent Film Award, 423-429

Kenneth Anger, *Scorpio Rising* (CK (1964, color, sound, 29 min.)
Gunvor Nelson and Dorothy Wylie, *Schmeerguntz* (Canyon) (1966, b&w, sound, 15 min.)
Christopher MacLaine *Beat* (NY Filmmakers Coop) (6 min)
Christopher MacLaine *The End* (NY Filmmakers Coop) (35min)

week eight**Tu Nov 12**

Ron Rice, *Senseless* (NY Filmmakers Coop) 28 min
Ron Rice *Chumlum* (FMC) 26 min
Ron Rice *Mexican Footage* (FMC) 10 min.

Th Nov 14

in Sitney: Geldzahler, *Some Notes on Sleep* 300-301.

Scott Bartlett, *1970* (NU video) (1970, 60 min.)
Andy Warhol , *Blow Job* (MOMA) (1964, c. 41 min at 16 fps.)

week nine**Tu Nov 19**

Peter Hutton, *July '71 in San Francisco...* (Canyon) (1971, 35 min.)
 George Kuchar, *Hold Me While I'm Naked* (NU video) 1966, co, so, 15 min.)
 Curt McDowell, *The Weiners and Buns Musical*, (Canyon) (1971, b&w, sound, 16 min.)

Th Nov 21

Richard Kern and Lydia Lunch, *The Right Side of my Brain* (CK pers copy) (c. 1984, S8mm/video, 30 min.)
 Janie Geiser, *The Secret Story*, 1996, 6 min (Canyon)
 Lewis Klahr, *Downs are Feminine*, 1994, 9 min (Canyon)
 Stan Brakhage, *The Lion and the Zebra Make God's Jewels*, 1999, 6 min (Canyon)

week ten

Tu Nov 26

exam questions handed out--screening for exam

Jim Benning, *8 1/2 x 10* (FMC) (33 min. 1974)
 Stephanie Beroes, *Debt Begins at 20* (Canyon) (1980 40 min.)
 Susan Pitt, *Asparagus* (NU video) (1978, color, sound, 19 min.)

week eleven

Tu Dec. 3

Bruce Baillie, *Roslyn Romance (Is It Really True?)* (Canyon) (1974, color, sound, 17 min.)
 Abigail Child *The B side* (FMC,) (1996, b/w, co, so, 38 min.)}
 Ernie Gehr, *Shift* (Canyon,) (1972-74, color, sound, 9 min.)

Th Dec 5

Peter Hutton, *New York Portrait, Chapter One* (Canyon) 1978-79, b/w, si, 16 min)
 Martha Colburn, *Evil of Dracula*, 1997, 1:59 min (\$20 Canyon)
 Greta Snider, *Flight*, 1996, 5 min (\$20 Canyon)
 Martin Arnold, *Alone Life Wastes Andy Hardy*, (\$50 FMC,

Final Exam

all take home exams must be turned in by 10 am on Tuesday Dec. 10 to Chuck's mailbox in AMS 215. No late exams. If you do not meet this deadline you MUST take the in class exam at 12 noon on Wednesday Dec. 11.

Because the films screened are usually not available elsewhere, such as at regular video stores, it is very important to attend class. Students with repeated absences will probably find it difficult or impossible to complete the course. Three or more absences are considered excessive and will lower your grade.

Be aware: Most of the films shown in this course affront established mainstream values: aesthetic, social, political, moral, religious, etc. Some films contain

(among other things) representations of nudity, violence, sexual activity (including various perversions), drug use, racial stereotyping, rape, infanticide, anorexia, bodily fluids, blasphemy, shaky hand-held camerawork, as well as mocking of official government policy, Christianity, normative heterosexuality, patriarchal values, and suburbia.

Assignments.

Reports. All undergrad students are required to turn in five reports of about 500-750 words on outside events. One every two weeks. No late papers. The reports may be subjective or objective, concentrate on the overall experience or just one film/tape, etc. There will be a list of suitable screenings/events on CourseInfo/Blackboard. The purpose of these fieldwork assignments is to give students additional screenings and experiences in Chicago's avant garde art and media community. 25% of final grade for undergrads; Grads must do three outside event reports: 15% for grads.

Grad students have an additional assignment (25% of final grade), which is to present one of the scheduled films in class, and to do additional outside reading, equivalent to a book. Grads must prepare a 2-3 page set of notes, questions, or topics related to the outside reading (for distribution to the other students) (due Nov. 14. posted on CourseInfo).

Exams. The **midterm** will count 30% of the final grade and consists of short answers on readings and screenings plus writing a short essay (in class) on a film to be shown in class. (25% for Grads)

The final (35% of final grade) will be for undergrads a choice: (a) a takehome essay based on screenings during the last three classes of the quarter, or (b) an inclass exam in two parts: writing an essay after seeing an unannounced film (about 40 min). The second part is over the entire course--screenings, readings, lectures and discussion. Grads must do the take home exam.

Final grade formula:

undergrads--discussion 10%, five outside screening reports 25%; midterm 30%, final 35%. grads--discussion 10%, midterm 20%, three outside screening reports 15%; reading/presentation report 25%, final 30%.

For the first assignment, students may choose either the current shows at the Museum of Contemporary Art or the galleries of 20th Century painting at the Art Institute (Michigan at Adams). Free Tuesday.

Books on reserve:

Books (2 hour reserve)

Battcock, Gregory, ed. *The New American Cinema: A Critical Anthology*. NY: E. P. Dutton, 1967.

Charters, Ann. *The Portable Beat Reader* (Penguin/Viking, 1992)

Hawkins, Joan. *Cutting Edge: Art-Horror and the Horrific Avant-Garde*. 2000

James, David E. *Allegories Of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties*. Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1989.

LeGrice, Malcolm. *Abstract Film and Beyond*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1977.

Macdonald, Scott. *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*. Berkeley: U of California, 1988.

Macdonald, Scott. *A Critical Cinema 2: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers*. Berkeley: U of California, 1992.

Macdonald, Scott. *Avant-Garde Film: Motion Studies*. Cambridge, Cambridge U.P. 1993.

Marks, Laura. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses*. (U of Minn?) 2000

Mekas, Jonas. *Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959-1971*. NY: Collier, 1972.

Peterson, James, *Dreams of Chaos, Visions of Order: Understanding the American Avant-garde Cinema* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1994)

Rees, A. L., *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (London:British Film Institute, 1999)

Russell, Catherine, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*. 2000.

Sitney, P. Adams, ed. *Film Culture Reader*. NY: Praeger, 1970.

Sitney, P. Adams, ed. *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives*. Vol. 1. NY: New York U. P., 1975.

Sitney, P. Adams, ed. *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism*. NY: New York U. P., 1978.

Sitney, P. Adams, *Visionary Film*, second edition. NY: Oxford UP

Wees, William C. *Light Moving in Time: Studies in the Visual Aesthetics of Avant-garde Film* (Berkeley: U of CA Press, 1992)

Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. NY: Dutton, 1970.

Student Conduct in School of Communication Courses

All undergraduate students in Communication Courses are accountable for the information about academic integrity printed in the University Bulletin. Students are also responsible for the following standards:

- Attendance is required in all Speech courses, and excessive absence is cause for failure.
- Credit will not be given for two courses that meet at the same time.
- To receive credit for a course, students must complete all of the work assigned.

•Assignments must be turned in on time and examinations must be taken as scheduled. Students are not entitled to make up assignments or to grades of Incomplete unless the instructor has approved such arrangements in advance.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

In compliance with Northwestern University policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with disability. Request for academic accommodations need to be made during the first week of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with Service for Students with Disabilities (SSD) for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

Of possible interest:

- a. The bulletin board experimental film discussion group Frameworks: FRAMEWORKS@LISTSERV.AOL.COM . > For info on FrameWorks, contact Pip Chodorov at <PipChod@aol.com>. Frameworks has an ongoing discussion of avant garde issues, technical q and a, and a weekly report of upcoming experimental screenings around the world.
- b. World Wide Web site: Flickr: <http://www.sirius.com/~sstark>. Among other things, the site archives Framework postings.